

AN INTRODUCTION TO **SAFE RETURN**

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ENDORSERS

Safe Return is an independent national committee, supported by thousands of concerned Americans, with the objective of winning a universal, no-strings amnesty for all categories of war resisters. War resisters are those who have either (1) refused induction into the military; (2) "deserted" the military as a means of protesting the war in Indochina; (3) have received less-than-honorable discharges as a result of resistance to the war or racism; or (4) have been, are still, or could be imprisoned because of their resistance to the war.

The activities of Safe Return have assumed even greater importance as President Nixon continues to distort responsibility for America's longest and most unpopular war. For most Americans, the end of direct military involvement in Vietnam has marked the end of a long and bitter experience. An experience that saw our national leadership sacrifice the lives of tens of thousands of our young men in the vain pursuit of a "peace with honor" and drained billions of our tax dollars for this immoral war. To avoid the question of responsibility for the war, and its enormous toll, the same leadership now responds that they cannot "forgive" the "few hundred" military deserters and draft resisters—that to do so would be an insult to the memories of those who fought and died in Southeast Asia.

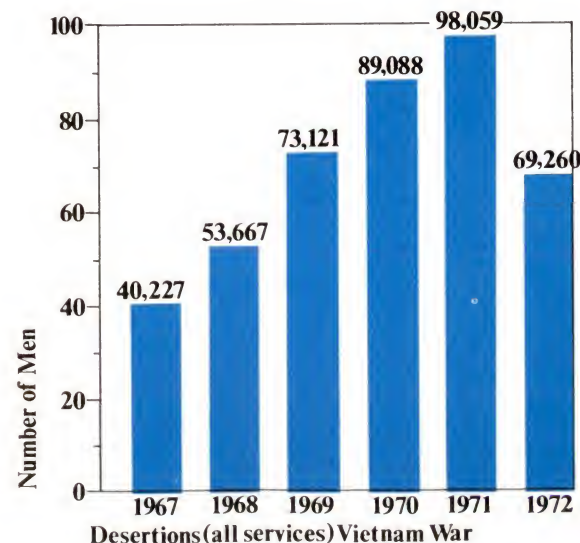
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

For American war resisters, the end of our direct military involvement in Vietnam marks the beginning of yet another painful experience. Contrary to President Nixon's claim that there are but a "few hundred" military deserters, the Department of Defense statistics place the actual figure at 521,000 through mid-1972. Add the number of Vietnam-era veterans with less-than-honorable discharges, the thousands of draft and civilian resisters, and the total number of Americans that would be affected by a universal, no-strings amnesty approaches one million! Their futures depend on our ability to win a just amnesty.

Deserters

521,000 Americans deserted the armed forces from 1967 to 1972. At any given time, according to the Pentagon, there are 35,000 deserters "at large." According to the *ARMY TIMES*, there have been 28,000 incidents of desertion in the first quarter, 1973.

Desertions in the military reached enormous proportions during the height of U.S. involvement in the Indochina war. Some resisters are in exile abroad, but most live underground in the United States. Others have been compelled to return or have been apprehended, and conviction for desertion is a foregone conclusion. Of the more than 500,000 who received bad discharges, nearly 50% are Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano or American Indian.



Draft Resisters

Since 1965, Selective Service has referred some 39,000 cases to the Department of Justice for prosecution. Of these, 12,000 have been indicted and 7,000 are currently serving prison or parole terms. An estimated 100,000 men never registered for the draft, and thus are subject to prosecution.

Exiles

An estimated 60,000 draft resisters and military deserters are in exile. While various forms of refugee status have been conferred by Canada, Sweden, France and England, all resisters are subject to prosecution upon return to American jurisdiction.

Less-Than-Honorable Discharges

According to the Department of Defense over 560,000 military personnel received less-than-honorable discharges during the period of direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam. A vast majority of these men have received bad discharges as a direct result of their opposition to the war, or racism, rampant in the military. A favorite military practice has been to use less-than-honorable discharges to rid the service of returning AWOLs, "trouble-makers," and GI activists. Those victimized with less-than-honorable discharges are barred from GI Bill, job training, unemployment compensation, and are crippled in securing other employment.

Civilian Resisters

Over 200,000 Americans were arrested, and a large percentage convicted, during the Vietnam-era for opposition to the war. Charges ranged from disturbing the peace to violation of Federal espionage acts as in the case of Dan Ellsberg and Anthony Russo.

ARGUMENTS OF OPPONENTS

To further the cause of amnesty, it is critical to counter the three basic arguments generally made by those who oppose unconditional amnesty.

1) *War resisters must be punished for breaking the duly-constituted laws of our nation. Not to enforce the laws will only encourage further law-breaking and invites anarchy. As Ex-Vice-President Agnew said; 'If we accepted all these young people back and said, 'you were right, it was an immoral war' what would happen if trouble broke out ten years from now? We would have established a precedent that would encourage those who choose to evade their responsibilities.'*

America has a long tradition whereby amnesties and pardons have been granted by the President and Congress. In each, from Washington's pardon

of the Whiskey Rebels in 1794 to Andrew Johnson's sweeping amnesty of all Confederate troops, widespread lawlessness did not follow. Young men did not resist out of hope for an amnesty, but out of revulsion with U.S. military conduct in Indochina. The vague prospect of an amnesty was certainly no inducement to spending long years in exile, prison, or in hiding.

A decade of deception, documented by the Pentagon Papers and amplified by the Watergate disclosures, is the context in which the supposed criminality of these young men must be judged. SAFE RETURN believes that these men are not criminals—to be hounded into prison.

2) *"Those who served in the military paid their price and those who resisted must also pay a price. The price is a criminal penalty for disobeying the laws of the United States."*

Despite the opposition of the vast majority of the American people, President Nixon prolonged the war almost five years beyond his 1968 campaign pledge to reveal a "secret plan" to end it. But now, his "peace with honor" has arrived—under the same terms that could have been obtained in 1968 and every subsequent year. This "peace" has cost over 55,000 dead and over 300,000 wounded in U.S. casualties alone. The attempt to connect *resistance* to the war to *responsibility* for the war's human toll is particularly ominous. Responding to this argument, Mrs. Patricia Simon, a Gold Star Mother whose only son, David, was killed in Vietnam responds; "Nixon says it makes a mockery of our sons if there's not some price exacted from those who didn't serve. But I don't demand a price because the resisters did the right and moral thing . . . to me, there's absolutely nothing to forgive."

3) *To grant amnesty would be to say that the entire United States policy in Southeast Asia was wrong.*

The proponents of this argument are often those civilian and military policy makers who conceived and directed the war in Indochina.

In a March 3, 1973 address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Mr. Agnew stated that "... these draft dodgers and deserters have not admitted that they were wrong; on the contrary, they say that the country is wrong and they are right. Until they recognize that it is they who have erred and not the country, we must be unyielding in how we treat them." This argument exposes the hypocrisy and arrogance that have become commonplace in the current Administration. They refuse to acknowledge that the country overwhelmingly opposed the war and that draft and military resisters were a direct expression of this opposition.

Yes! To grant amnesty is to condemn U.S. policies in Southeast Asia. Our public officials still hide these policies in a cloak of "national security" rather than expose them to public scrutiny.

SAFE RETURN'S AMNESTY CAMPAIGN

Safe Return maintains an office in Washington, D.C. staffed by Vietnam-era veterans, who provide regular distribution of amnesty material to all Senators and Representatives. They also assist families of war resisters who wish to meet with their Congressmen.

In May and October, 1973, we organized and held Ad Hoc Congressional Hearings for Unconditional Amnesty together with a panel of Congressmen. The May session chaired by Congresswoman Bella Abzug, enabled families and war resisters to testify for the first time on Capitol Hill. Representative John Conyers joined Ms. Abzug in chairing the October hearings where Vietnam-era veterans described the debilitating effects of less-than-honorable discharges, and their need for amnesty. Additional hearings are planned in the coming months.

Safe Return has sponsored the public surrender of three Vietnam Veterans; John Herndon, Tom Michaud, and Edward Sowders, who refused further military service due to opposition to the Vietnam war. They had lived for several years either underground or in exile, and their public surrenders dramatized the need for a universal amnesty. We waged vigorous defense campaigns for these men, based on their duty to refuse to execute criminal military policies in Indochina.

Safe Return has also assisted families of war resisters in the formation of FORA, Families of Resisters for Amnesty. Several hundred family members have already joined and organized FORA chapters throughout the country.

Safe Return is creating a highly-visible publicity campaign called 'Tell It To Washington' utilizing all forms of media, to advocate a universal, no-strings amnesty. Public Service advertising in radio, television, newspapers and magazines is being placed throughout the country.

Safe Return also publishes the bi-monthly *AMNESTY REPORT*, a journal reporting on the Amnesty movement in the United States. In addition, we provide speakers for public events and debates; and act as a national clearinghouse for persons seeking suggestions or ideas on implementing local amnesty work in their community.